The eggs diapause over winter, and development resumes after the spring thaw 13-17 June 2024 Goldsmiths University of London Show and accompanying text by Velda Phua

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I. No Energy

Objects that are not actively moving but have the capacity to do so are said to possess potential energy. Potential energy becomes converted to kinetic energy once the objects start moving. The potential energy of the spring is the potential energy stored as a result of the deformation of a particular elastic object.

The word 'energy' is derived from the Greek word energeia (activity, operation), from energos (active, effective) which is from en (in) plus ergon (work). Sickness comes to most like a hiccup, like being a spring that has briefly lost its shape. The statement 'I have no energy' is a request for respite with the implicit promise to return. A precarious negotiation: how many strikes on the board before our plug is pulled out for good? The little spring quivers within the big machine. As we rest we are re-compressed. Potential energy is gathered again. In the sad marriage between wellness and productivity, rest is granted only to accumulate capital for future movement.

Where does this leave bodies that are incapable of holding potential energy, bodies that will never regain shape? If the neoliberal capitalist body is celebrated according to its ability to perform and produce, the sick body is scorned.

Without energy, we are dead machinery. To the scrapyard we go.

II. The Sick Bed

Sometimes our refusal is in our staying put. Some days my only certain we is this certain we that didn't, that wouldn't, whose bodies or spirits wouldn't go along. That we slowed, stood around, blocked the way, kept a stone face when the others were complicit and smiling. And still we ghost, and no-show, and in the enigma of refusal, we find that we endogenously produce our own incapacity to even try, grow sick and depressed and motionless under all the merciless and circulatory conditions of all the capitalist yes and just can't, even if we thought we really wanted to. This is as if a river, who saw the scale of the levees, decided that rather than try to exceed them, it would outwit them by drying up. There is a lot of room for a meaning inside a "no" spoken in the tremendous logic of a refused order of the world. Poetry's no can protect a potential yes.¹

When I fell sick, my window became a movie screen. I spent copious amounts of time in my bed, dreaming. Often I prioritised them over my wakeful reality. My days passed by like this. My dreams swallowed me, and I recorded them extensively. I inhabited a dream-space that was completely constituted from my consciousness. It felt like everything I would see and feel and sense in these dreams were mine and familiar, because I had birthed it entirely. If '[f]amiliarity is shaped by the 'feel' of space or by how spaces 'impress' upon bodies', then 'the familiar is shaped by actions that reach out toward objects that are already within reach' (Ahmed, 2006). In my dreams, everything was within my reach. My body extended into infinity.

No body is better acquainted with a bed than one that is sick. Sickness manifests itself capriciously, but the bed seems to be the final place to which all ill bodies return. Think hospital beds, beds in nursing homes, beds in school sick-bays. Importantly, invisible illnesses frequently reveal themselves in the space of the bed-at-home, where we take on roles of doctor, patient, nurse and guardian all at once. In the dictionary of delight, vitality is defined by the ability to move: to have a bounce in one's step, to be alive and kicking, to jump with joy. Stillness is only acceptable in bite-sized portions. While non-ill bodies might imagine the bed as a marvellous site of rest, ill bodies are not as innocent. As Susan Sontag wrote, 'illness exacerbates consciousness'. When we are forced into immobility, we simultaneously navigate the breakdown of our bodies with the world that continues to move without and against us. From our bed-station, we begin: with incapacity and within capacity.

III. Becoming-insect

The [bug]'s way of sensing is a clear-minded sensing of the world as world aligns against the [bug]: demystified, dependent, and with brutality intact. The [bug] - like all prey, and unlike any predator — is a scholar of the all. 2

The bug that we squash without thought, the bug as condemned creature, the bug as trespasser of spaces we delineate as home. In A Maggot, Kirsty Hendry writes: 'Bugs are often used to describe anomaly - a breakdown or rupture in the proper functioning of things. Bugs themselves are indeterminate, only perceptible through the disruption they produce; unspecified and ambiguous errors. Bugs operate across software, hardware, and wetware as the causes of technical failings, mechanical breakdowns, and sickness. Applied within the context the body - we use 'bug' as a synonym for bacteria and germs - an infectious but unspecified illness of ambiguous origin, contracted through chance encounter with an unknown contagion. [...] It is thought that disgust is a theory of evolution. Our revulsion towards maggots is not directed at their material presence but at what they have come to represent; maggots are an ecological red flag, a warning of imperceptible threats and dangers to life.' However, 'the bug in itself is not a fault, but an indication that relationships within a particular system require renegotiation. Rather than a destructive force, their presence should be understood as a restorative practice.'

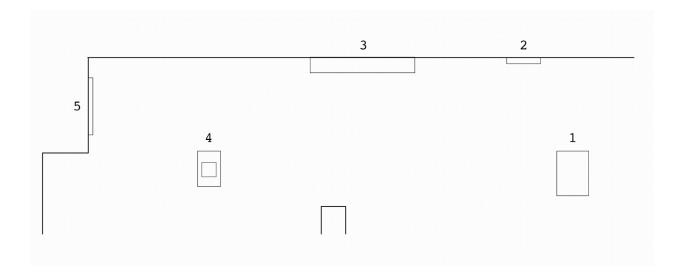
According to Murphy (2008), 'becoming-insect' is a site for non-heteronormative, utopian configurations; it embraces the multiplicity and indeterminacy the insect represents because of its radical difference.

A bug-bite itches because our immune system fights substances in the bug saliva with a variety of mediators such as histamine. A diapause is the physiological state of dormancy or developmental arrest where most life processes are shut down. It is initiated during unfavourable conditions and is most commonly observed in insects. A cocoon is a protective envelope that insect larvae use to develop into their pupal stage. Maggots are efficient consumers of dead tissue. They munch on rotting flesh, leaving healthy tissue practically unscathed. Mayflies experience generational death every twenty four hours.

In considering insect phenomena, we might be able to reconfigure our relationship around the experience of illness. Consider the irritating nature of autoimmune illnesses and sickness that cannot be treated at the doctor's. Consider depression, fatigue, burnout, hives, remnants of childhood eczema, period cramps. Consider motion sickness in relation to bodies that are displaced from home. These experiences frequently and irritatingly oscillate over the threshold between mild annoyance and severe pain. But when we acknowledge how the unminded expanse of the body can be reduced immediately to the local site of a bug bite that won't stop itching, the war within our bodies might make us aware of what 'makes our systems such inhospitable hosts' (Hendry, 2018). Through becoming-insect, we 'might come to appreciate 'the bug' not so much as a warning but a welcomed tell - a reminder that ideological systems live in my body as they do in yours.' (Hendry, 2018) By keeping the bug out, what exactly are we rejecting? Replacing revulsion with cohabitation and kinship, let us sit with the condemned bodies of bugs and misshapen springs. Let us reimagine the sick-bed as a site of potential and stillness as the root of transformation. Let us, for once and for all, embrace our alienated, abandoned, abhorred temporality.

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^{1 2} Anne Boyer. (2018). A handbook of disappointed fate. Dossier.



- 1. Itch, 2024. Ink transfer print on canvas
- Looking Out The Window/I Saw The Blue Sky, 2024. Gauze, air dry clay, beeswax, soap, loose tea leaf residue, cotton on canvas
- 3. *Diapause*, 2024. Iron bed frame, galvanised steel wire, medical gauze, unbleached scrim, handmade lavender fragrance
- 4. Now Hug The Mayfly, 2024. Bricks, vitamin D pills
- 5. Altar for A Burning Bone, 2024. Traditional Chinese liniment 正骨水 (zheng gu shui) and ink transfer print on canvas, Chinese pain relief patches, incense